as an Israeli spy, and incarcerated for 17 months. He was subjected to harsh interrogation techniques, and received no treatment for a debilitating case of glaucoma.

Despite public pledges from senior Bangladeshi Government officials that all pending legal action against Mr. Choudhury would be dropped, the government pressed forward on its prosecution of Choudhury for sedition. Mr. Choudhury won PEN USA's "Freedom to Write Award," and was presented with the American Jewish Committee's prestigious "Moral Courage Award" in absentia in Washington, DC. Mr. Choudhury's newspaper offices were bombed by Islamic extremists in July, and he was attacked by a mob in his office on October 5. Then a judge with alleged ties to an Islamic extremist group ruled that Mr. Choudhury must stand trial for sedition.

For his message of moderation and interfaith dialogue, Shoaib Choudhury is facing unjust criminal charges in an effort to silence him. Congress must send a clear message: we cannot allow moderate voices in the Muslim world to be silenced.

The resolution I introduce today calls on the Government of Bangladesh to drop all charges against Shoaib Choudhury, return his passport and possessions, and end his harassment. I want to thank Congresswoman NITA LOWEY for being the lead cosponsor of this legislation. I look forward to working with her and my other colleagues on this important human rights initiative.

IN RECOGNITION OF LORAINE KEHL ON HER RETIREMENT FROM THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HON. VERNON J. EHLERS

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 16, 2007

Mr. EHLERS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to my longtime executive assistant and scheduler, Loraine Kehl, who is retiring on February 6 after 22 years of service to this House of Representatives and the citizens of the Third Congressional District of Michigan, which I represent.

Loraine was an original staff member dating back to when I took office on Dec. 7, 1993. Prior to working for me, she served in her same capacities for my predecessor, the late Paul Henry, throughout most of his tenure in the House, dating back to 1985. Prior to working for Congressman Henry, she also worked briefly for the House Budget Committee. In her time with me, she has been my indispensable, right-hand person. She keeps me on schedule, makes sure all the bills are paid and the trains run on time. Though it should go without saying, she will be greatly and deeply missed.

Given her 22 years of service to our district, it is no surprise that she is well known and beloved among the people of Grand Rapids and West Michigan and the many other people who have done business with our office. She has been a fixture in our front office, greeting old friends and newcomers alike, offering assistance in getting White House tours and providing advice for visitors to Washington. She is deeply appreciated by my constituents for her helpful assistance, her impeccable memory for names and faces and her consistent concern for the needs of those who call or visit. In a very real way, she has been the public face for our Washington office for more than the past two decades.

Madam Speaker, I hope that you and the rest of our colleagues will join me in wishing Loraine Kehl a very happy and fulfilling retirement.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. SANDER M. LEVIN

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 16, 2007

Mr. LEVIN. Madam Speaker, last Friday, I was unavoidably absent during rollcalls 22 and 23. Had I been present, I would have voted "nay" on rollcall 22, the motion to recommit H.R. 4 with instructions. I would have voted "yea" on rollcall 23, final passage of H.R. 4, the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act of 2007.

SUPPORT FOR THE SAFE COMMISSION

HON. FRANK R. WOLF

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 16, 2007

Mr. WOLF. Madam Speaker, today I reintroduced legislation in the House of Representatives aimed at addressing the looming financial crisis facing the Nation, the Securing America's Future Economy (SAFE) Commission Act. The bill would establish a national bipartisan commission that will put everything—entitlement spending as well as all other Federal programs and our Nation's tax policies—on the table and require Congress to vote up or down on its recommendations in their entirety, similar to the process set in 1988 to close military bases. Mandating congressional action on the panel's recommendations is what differentiates this commission from previous ones.

Support for the bill is coming from both sides of the aisle. I submit for the RECORD an op-ed by former Senators Bob Kerrey and Warren Rudman that ran in the Washington Post, an op-ed by former Congressman Tim Penny that ran in the Washington Times, columns by David Broder and Robert Samuelson, and editorials from the Dallas Morning News, and the Orlando Sentinel on the topic of entitlement reform.

This legislation will be good for the future of America.

[From the Washington Post, Aug. 28, 2006]

SECURING FUTURE FISCAL HEALTH

[By Bob Kerrey and Warren B. Rudman]

The economic and moral case for long-term reform of fiscal policy is clear. Yet politicians refuse to act. If this stalemate persists, it could end in catastrophe.

Over the next 30 years, spending on federal programs is on track to go up by 50 percent as a share of the economy. If revenues remain at their historical level, the resulting deficits will approach 20 percent of gross domestic product by 2036—almost 10 times the current size. The debt will surge to 200 percent of GDP—twice what it was at the end of World War II.

Political realities explain why nothing has been done about this. Changing course would require substantial spending cuts from projected levels or equivalent tax increases. Neither party wants to be the first to propose these tough choices out of fear that the other side would attack it. Similarly, neither side wants to discuss possible compromises of its own priorities, out of fear that the other side will take the concessions and run. Unfortunately, these fears are justified.

Since the regular legislative process seems incapable of dealing with the impending crisis, some alternative has to be found. President Bush has suggested a commission. Having served on many commissions, we understand their potential value. We also understand how they can go wrong. In our view, a new commission could be very useful, but only if it recognizes fiscal and political realities. It needs five elements to succeed.

First, it has to be truly bipartisan. Any perception that the commission's purpose is to facilitate swift enactment of a partisan agenda would doom it to failure. It must have bipartisan co-chairs and equal representation. Doing otherwise in the current partisan environment would be a waste of time and money.

Second, it must have a broad mandate. While it is critical to control the growth of entitlements, particularly Medicare and Social Security, the commission should examine all aspects of fiscal policy.

Third, all options must be on the table. If either side sets conditions, the other won't participate. Republicans cannot take tax increases off the table, and Democrats cannot take benefit reductions off the table.

Fourth, the commission needs to engage the public in a genuine dialogue about the trade-offs inherent in realistic solutions. When people are armed with the facts and given the opportunity for honest dialogue, they are willing to set priorities and make hard choices.

Fifth, the commission's recommendations should be given an up-or-down vote in Congress, allowing for amendments that would not reduce the total savings. Absent that, the report would likely join many others on a shelf.

Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.) and Sen. George Voinovich (R-Ohio) have put forward a proposal that satisfies most of these elements. They would create a bipartisan commission with a broad mandate to examine long-term fiscal challenges. All policy options would be on the table. The commission would solicit input from the public and develop legislation that Congress and the president would be required to act on. Its work would address four key concerns: the unsustainable gap between projected spending and revenue, the need to increase national savings, the implications of foreign ownership of U.S. government debt and the lack of emphasis on long-term planning in the budget process.

A commission with these attributes could give all parties the political cover they need to tackle the tough choices and develop a bipartisan consensus for solutions. This would be invaluable regardless of who controls Congress or the White House.

In the end, of course, elected representatives, not a commission, will have to make the hard decisions. But a commission that produced solutions with meaningful bipartisan support would provide a catalyst for action. If Congress were required to vote on the commission's recommendations, opponents would be challenged to produce solutions of their own.

Advocates of extending tax cuts would be challenged to say how they would restrain spending enough to avoid cascading debt once the baby boomers begin to retire in

large numbers. Those who oppose reductions in current entitlement promises would be challenged to say how they would fund those promises without squeezing out other priorities or raising taxes to unacceptable levels that could damage the economy.

The Wolf-Voinovich proposal has been greeted with silence or outright hostility. It deserves better. This is a serious proposal by two leaders who regard the debt burden and draconian policy options we are leaving to future generations as a moral stain on our nation's character.

To be sure, their proposal has shortcomings that must be corrected. Two improvements that are critical to the success of a commission are providing for bipartisan co-chairs and dividing the membership more evenly between parties than the current 9–6 split in favor of Republican appointments. These problems are not minor technicalities, but they could be fixed in negotiations with potential Democratic co-sponsors.

Time is running out to enact reforms. Wolf and Voinovich have come up with a credible way to get the process started. Any takers?

[From the Washington Times, Sept. 4, 2006]

TAXES AND SPENDING—SUPPORT WOLF'S BILL ON ENTITLEMENTS

(By Timothy J. Penny)

Every American is familiar with the story of the ''Boston Tea Party.'' In 1773 the British parliament passed the Tea Act, which then inflamed the colonial issue of ''taxation without representation.'' In response to the ''tea tax'' dozens of courageous colonists who called themselves the ''Sons of Liberty''—boarded three British ships and dumped 45 tons of tea into the Boston Harbor.

I have come to believe that we need a modern day equivalent of the Boston Tea Party. Here is why I have arrived at this conclusion: Our nation's current fiscal policies are creating a mountain of debt that our grandchildren will be forced to repay through higher taxes. The unfunded promises we have made to recipients of Social Security and Medicare and other entitlement programs will almost certainly lead to higher taxes on today's children and those yet to be born. In my view, that amounts to ''taxation without representation.''

The British parliament paid no heed to the American colonists because the Americans had no vote or voice in the halls of government. Similarly, today's Congress seldom considers the long-term consequences of its budget decisions because kids don't vote.

Part of the problem lies with the current congressional budget process. On Capitol Hill the bulk of time and attention each year is devoted to the annual appropriations bills. While these bills—which fund defense and domestic programs—are important, they constitute only about one-third of all the money spent by the federal government. The other two thirds of spending goes to so-called ''mandatory'' programs: interest on the debt and entitlement programs, such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Though representing the vast majority of dollars spent every year, these ''mandatory'' spending programs receive little—if any—debate on Capitol Hill The expenditures are essentially automatic. That is not right.

Why shouldn't every dollar of expenditure come under close review every year? More attention must be paid to these mandatory programs because of their long-range costs. Before long, Social Security and Medicare alone will consume virtually all the taxes paid by working Americans. It is not fair to the next generation to saddle them with enormous costs for entitlement programs and leave them no alternative except to reduce spending for other priorities or to pay ever higher taxes.

Unlike our patriot forbears, we do not have to resort to extreme measures. But we do need an uprising of the American public demanding that our elected representatives do their jobs. By e-mail, letters, phone calls or speaking out at town meetings, we must make our voices heard. We must speak out for those who are too young to speak for themselves.

When we speak out, we can specifically ask legislators to join their colleague, Rep. Frank Wolf, Virginia Republican, in sponsoring legislation to create a bipartisan entitlement commission. Mr. Wolf is a member of the appropriations committee, and understands that entitlement spending deserves closer scrutiny than is provided in the current budget process. He realizes that the difficult decisions required—if entitlement spending is to be brought under control—can only be achieved through a bipartisan effort. He also believes that all options must be on the table. Finally, and most importantly, he sees that as a matter of morality and fairness to future generations.

So, during the coming weeks as legislators wrap up their work in Washington and return home to campaign, speak out for your children and grandchildren. If, after hearing from us, our elected officials refuse to endorse Mr. Wolf's reasonable approach, then, like the Boston Tea Party, we should throw them overboard this November.

[From the Washington Post, May 21, 2006]

BAILING THE FUTURE OUT OF DEBT

(By David S. Broder)

Almost forgotten in the rush events these past four months is the proposal President Bush offered in the State of the Union address for a bipartisan commission to examine the future of Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and other entitlement programs.

But that idea is due for a rebirth next month—in the form of legislation to create such a commission. Its sponsor, Rep. Frank Wolf, a veteran Republican from Virginia, is well aware of the hazards facing any such enterprise. But unlike the president, he is explicitly prepared to remove one giant roadblock by signaling that everything—including taxes—would be on the table.

The need for such a bipartisan approach is evident. As Charles Blahous, the White House aide who has been pursuing the commission idea, told a Concord Coalition forum last week, Medicare and Medicaid are growing far faster than inflation and will consume an ever-larger share of the budget as the baby boomers reach retirement age, starting in just a couple of years. Social Security and veterans' pensions are moving in the same direction.

''We cannot wait until 2040,'' when those programs could crater, Blahous said. ''And we can't just do incremental reform.''

Bush took his first stab at fixing Social Security last year with a proposal to create private accounts, but it ran into a buzz saw of opposition led by AARP and congressional Democrats and never came to a vote.

The commission, idea seemed a safe fallback when Bush floated it in January, but his overtures to Democrats were not accepted.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi publicly ridiculed the idea, and former Treasury secretary Robert Rubin, approached personally by the president, said that the mandate of the commission would have to be broad enough to include revenue before he would consider participating.

Months later, the White House insists it is still seeking partners for the project, and a spokesman told me that, ''there is no litmus test'' for participants.

But I have talked with many of the backstage players in this drama, and their sense is that Bush will not allow his tax cuts to be weighed along with any savings on the benefits side—at lease not before this November's midterm election.

Enter Frank Wolf, known as ''the conscience of the House,'' because of his involvement in humanitarian causes here and overseas. ''The issue is not just economic, it's moral,'' he told me. ''We have 11 grandchildren, and I cannot square my generation laying off our debt on them.''

''I supported all the president's tax cuts,'' Wold said, ''but I look down the road and I see just a very bleak situation.''

Wolf will propose a bipartisan commission that would hold hearings around the country and report back in six to nine months on steps to deal with the long-term budget crisis. His legislation, modeled on the procedure now used for closing surplus military bases, would require the House and Senate to hold a vote on the commission proposal—but allow each body and the president to submit an alternative that achieves at least as good a result.

Wolf's hope is that the commission would attract such figures as former representatives John Kasich, an Ohio Republican, and Charles Stenholmm a Texas democrat, or former Treasury secretaries Rubin and James A. Baker III.

His proposal meets most of the criteria set forth at last week's panel by David Walker, the head of the Government Accountability Office, as critical to a successful commission. But Walker said presidential support and leadership are also vital to success.

Wolf told me, ''You'd hope the commission members wouldn't look at taxes first, but they have to look at everything.'' That was emphatically the view of everyone on the concord Coalition panel, including Walker, Stenholm, and two rather liberal economists, Isabel Sawhill and Maya MacGuineas, as well as Joseph Minarik of the business-backed committee for Economic Development.

The most conservative panelist, Stuart Butler of the Heritage Foundation, said that he accepted the idea that revenue would have to be open to discussion for the Democrats to ''buy in.''

But he proposed that conservatives could be mollified if the commission's mandate included an instruction that any changes in the tax code must help simplify the system and increase economic growth. ''That way, it's win-win,'' he said.

The White House had scheduled a meeting for the president with some of the experts on the Concord Coalition panel to walk through the plans for such a commission. That session was postponed, and it has not been rescheduled.

But if the president is interested—and if he is willing to put ''everything on the table''—the Wolf initiative could become his action-forcing device.

[From the Washington Post, Jan. 10, 2007]

ENTITLED SELFISHNESS—BOOMER GENERATION IS IN A STATE OF DENIAL

(By Robert J. Samuelson)

As someone born in late 1945, I say this to the 76 million or so subsequent baby boomers and particularly to Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, our generation's leading politicians: Shame on us. We are trying to rob our children and grandchildren, putting the country's future at risk in the process. On one of the great issues of our time, the social and economic costs of our retirement, we have adopted a policy of selfish silence.

As Congress reconvenes, pledges of ''fiscal responsibility'' abound. Let me boldly predict: On retirement spending, this Congress

will do nothing, just as previous Congresses have done nothing. Nancy Pelosi promises to ''build a better future for all of America's children.'' If she were serious, she would back cuts in Social Security and Medicare. President Bush calls ''entitlement spending'' the central budget problem. If he were serious, he, too, would propose cuts in Social Security and Medicare.

They are not serious, because few Americans—particularly prospective baby-boom retirees—want them to be. There is a consensus against candor, because there is no constituency for candor. It's no secret that the 65-and-over population will double by 2030 (to almost 72 million, or 20 percent of the total population), but hardly anyone wants to face the implications:

By comparison, other budget issues, including the notorious earmarks, are trivial. In 2005, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid (the main programs for the elderly) cost $1.034 trillion, twice the amount of defense spending and more than two-fifths of the total federal budget. These programs are projected to equal about three.quarters of the budget by 2030, if it remains constant as a share of national income.

Preserving present retirement benefits automatically imposes huge costs on the young—costs that are economically unsound and socially unjust. The tax increases required by 2030 could hit 50 percent, if other spending is maintained as a share of national income. Or much of the rest of government (from defense to national parks) would have to be shut down or crippled. Or budget deficits would balloon to quadruple today's level.

Social Security and Medicare benefits must be cut to keep down overall costs. Yes, some taxes will be raised and some other spending cut. But much of the adjustment should come from increasing eligibility ages (ultimately to 70) and curbing payments to wealthier retirees. Americans live longer and are healthier. They can work longer and save more for retirement.

Because I've written all this before, I can anticipate some of the furious responses from prospective retirees. First will be the ''social compact'' argument: We paid to support today's retirees; tomorrow's workers must pay to support us. Well, of course they will pay; the question is how much. The alleged compact is entirely artificial, acknowledged only by those who benefit from it. My three children (ages 16 to 21) didn't endorse it. Judging from the e-mail I receive, neither did many 20- or 30-somethings.

Next I'll hear that the Social Security and Medicare trust funds, intended to cover future benefits, have been ''plundered.'' Blame Congress and the White House—not us. This is pure fiction.

Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are pay-as-you-go programs. Present taxes pay present benefits. In 2005, 86 percent of Social Security payroll taxes went to pay current retiree benefits. True, excess taxes had created a ''surplus'' in the Social Security trust fund (it hasn't been ''plundered'') of $1.66 trillion in 2005; but that equaled less than four years' worth of present benefits. More important, Medicare and Medicaid represent three-quarters of the projected spending increase for retirees by 2030.

All the misinformation bespeaks political evasion. With his rhetorical skills, Clinton might have raised public understanding. Instead, he lowered it by falsely denouncing the Republicans for attempting to ''destroy'' Medicare. The first refuge of good Democrats is to accuse the Republicans of conspiring against old folks by trying to dismantle Social Security and Medicare. And Bush's credibility is shot, because he made the problem worse. His Medicare drug benefit increases spending, and though it could have been justified as part of a grand bargain that reduced other benefits, its isolated enactment was a political giveaway.

The failure to communicate also implicates many pundits and think tanks, liberal and conservative. Pundits usually speak in bland generalities. They support ''fiscal responsibility'' and ''entitlement reform'' and oppose big budget deficits. Less often do they say plainly that people need to work longer and that retirees need to lose some benefits. Think tanks endlessly publish technical reports on Social Security and Medicare, but most avoid the big issues. Are present benefits justified? How big can government become before the resulting taxes or deficits harm the economy?

Opportunities for gradual change have been squandered. These public failings are also mirrored privately. I know many bright, politically engaged boomers who can summon vast concern or outrage about global warming, corporate corruption, foreign policy, budget deficits and much more—but somehow, their own Social Security and Medicare benefits rarely come up for discussion or criticism. Older boomers (say, those born by 1955) are the most cynical, hoping their benefits will be grandfathered in when inevitable cuts occur in the future.

Our children will not be so blind to this hypocrisy. We have managed to take successful programs—Social Security and Medicare—and turn them into huge problems by our self-centered inattention. Baby boomers seem eager to ''reinvent retirement'' in all ways except those that might threaten their pocketbooks.

[From The Dallas Morning News, June 8, 2006]

DEEP IN THE BUDGET HOLE—BIPARTISAN PANEL COULD HELP COUNTRY DIG OUT

When you're almost $10 trillion in the hole, you've got to call somebody, right?

Fortunately, GOP Rep. Frank Wolf has a suggestion to deliver us from the gates of budget hell. The Virginia legislator introduced legislation yesterday that would establish a bipartisan commission charged with presenting the choices required to balance the budget.

The panel would function like the commission that former Texas GOP Rep. Dick Armey launched to close down unnecessary military bases. An independent group would give Congress a budget package, which legislators would vote up or down on unless the House and Senate come up with better solutions.

President Bush proposed a version of this approach earlier this year when he called for a bipartisan commission to recommend how Washington can control runaway spending on Social Security, Medicare and other big guaranteed programs.

But Mr. Wolf understands that the budget challenges are not all about spending. They also involve taxes and how much revenue the Treasury needs to pay for the services Americans demand.

In an encouraging sign, White House economic adviser Allen Hubbard recently acknowledged that any bipartisan panel probably would look at taxes.

He wasn't saying the White House is backing off its fondness for tax cuts, but it was a Washington way of saying, ''Let's look at the whole range of choices.''

We encourage North Texas representatives to line up as sponsors of Mr. Wolf's legislation and help get it through the House this summer. (The delegation's chief deficit fighter, GOP Rep. Jeb Hensarling of Dallas, told us last week that he wants to look at the proposal.)

It's time Washington reaches out for help.

By the numbers: $9.6 trillion: The amount of debt Congress recently authorized the Treasury to borrow (the limit was $6.4 trillion four summers ago); $2.8 trillion: The likely 2007 federal budget; $399 billion: Next year's interest expense on the federal debt; $27,000: What every man, woman and child would owe to eliminate the federal debt; 37.4 percent: How much of the gross domestic product the federal debt consumes.

[From the Orlando Sentinel, June 12, 2006]

GET ON WITH IT

Our position: A panel on Medicare and other issues would get needed talks started.

Finally, someone in Congress has taken up President Bush's call for a bipartisan commission on the looming financial crisis if no changes are made to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

Unchecked growth in the cost of these programs in coming decades will devastate the economy by forcing some combination of huge tax increases, drastic spending cuts or massive borrowing.

This past week, Republican Rep. Frank Wolf of Virginia proposed a panel aptly named SAFE, to secure America's future economy. Its bipartisan experts would deliver a package of recommendations to Congress for an up-or-down vote.

Mr. Wolf says he is open to suggestions on his proposal. Members unwilling to support it have a moral obligation to come forward with something they deem better.

INTRODUCTION OF THE VALERIE PLAME WILSON COMPENSATION ACT

HON. JAY INSLEE

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 16, 2007

Mr. INSLEE. Madam Speaker, I rise today to bring to the attention of Congress one of the human impacts caused by the indiscretion of government officials regarding the covert identity of Central Intelligence Agency operative Valerie Plame Wilson.

As nearly every American knows, and as most of the world has heard, the covert CIA identity of Valerie Plame Wilson was exposed to the public as part of an Administration response to a critical op-ed published in the New York Times by Mrs. Plame Wilson's husband, Joe Wilson.

The national security ramifications for this act have been discussed thoroughly on this floor, in the news media, and I am quite certain behind CIA's closed doors. Today I intend to call my colleagues' attention to the human toll that this ''outing'' has had on one, often overlooked, individual. That person is Valerie Plame Wilson.

While the media, Congress, and the judiciary have gone to great lengths to discuss the impact of this unfortunate act on politicians, bureaucrats, agents in the field, and the suspected perpetrators of the outing, few have looked at the impact that the outing has had on Mrs. Plame Wilson and her family.

On July 14, 2003, Mrs. Plame Wilson's professional life was forever altered, and her CIA career irrevocably ruined by the syndicated publication of a column, which revealed Mrs. Plame Wilson's identity as a covert CIA officer. Since this time, numerous reports on Mrs. Plame Wilson's personal history have surfaced